

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01

INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02

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FM AMEMBASSY TUNIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6172

INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY ROME

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

AMEMBASSY VALLETTA

USCINCEUR

USCINCNAVEUR

AMEMBASSY LONDON

C O N F I D E N T I A L TUNIS 2043

MILITARY ADDEES ALSO FOR POLADS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, MARR, TS, LY, IT

SUBJECT: ITALIAN DEFENSE MINISTER VISITS TUNISIA

1. ITALIAN MINISTER OF DEFENSE VITO LATTANZIO VISITED TUNISIA FROM MARCH 21 TO 24 AT THE INVITATION OF GOT DEFENSTLOPNISTER ABDALLAH FARHAT. WHILE HERE, LATTANZIO CALLED ON PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA (WHO DECORATED HIM WITH THE GRAND CORDON OF THE REPUBLIC), PRIME MINISTER NOUIRA, HELD "WORKING SESSIONS" WITH TUNISIAN DEFENSE MINISTRY OFFICIALS, AND VISITED BIZERTE. LATTANZIO ALSO ATTENDED A GATHERING OF REMNANTS OF THE ONCE LARGE ITALIAN COMMUNITY IN TUNISIA.

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2. ON ARRIVAL IN TUNIS LATTANZIO TOLD THE PRESS THAT THE MEDITERRANEAN "IS NOT A SEA THAT DIVIDES US" BUT "WE SEEK TO MAKE IT A HARBOR OF PEACE AND A BRIDGE BETWEEN US AND THE ARAB COUNTRIES." AFTER CALLING ON PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA, LATTANZIO SAID THE TUNISIAN LEADER IS NOT ONLY A CHIEF OF STATE BUT "SYMBOLIZES THE FREE WORLD." BOURGUIBA, HE SAID, RETAINS IIVHIS

VIGOR DESPITE THE LONG BATTLE HE HAS CONDUCTED FOR LIBERTY. AFTER HIS MEETING WITH NOUIRA, LATTANZIO SAID TUNISIA AND ITALY ARE UNITED BY A COMMON WILL TO BUILD A "JUNCTION" OF EUROPE AND THE ARAB WORLD ON SOLID BASES.

3. THE MOST INTERESTING PUBLIC STATEMENTS MADE DURING THE VISIT CAME FROM THE TUNISIANS. ABDALLAH FARHAT'S TOAST AT THE DINNER HE HOSTED FOR LATTANZIO NOTED THAT TUNISIAN EFFORTS TO BUILD UP ITS ARMED FORCES WERE NOT DIRECTED AGAINST ANYONE BUT RATHER INTENDED TO GUARD AGAINST "ALL WHIMS" THREATENING ITS TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY AND INDEPENDENCE. HE SAID TUNISIA HAS NOTED MORE AND MORE FEROCIOUS APPETITES AMONG CERTAIN LARGE COUNTRIES AND "EVEN OFTEN AMONG SMALL ONES." TUNISIA, FARHAT SAID, COUNTS ON THE UNDERSTANDING OF ITS FRIENDS WHO HAVE NEVER CEASED TO SUPPORT HER CONSTANTLY AND EFFICACIOUSLY." TUNISIA ONLY WANTS TO BUILD A JUST AND PROSPEROUS SOCIETY AND HAVE GOOD RELATIONS WITH ALL COUNTRIES, ESPECIALLY ITS NEIGHBORS, AND IS HAPPY TO COUNT ITALY AMONG THE COUNTRIES THAT SUPPORT TUNISIAN POLICY OF ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT IN PEACE, SECURITY AND IN MUTUAL RESPECT FOR RECIPROCAL INTERESTS.

4. IN A JOINT COMMUNIQUE ISSUED AT THE END OF LATTANZIO'S VISIT, THE TWO MINISTERS SAID THAT THEY WILL REINFORCE AND DIVERSIFY THE RELATIONS BETWEEN THEIR TWO COUNTRIES AND WORK EFFECTIVELY FOR THE CONSOLIDATION OF PEACE AND STABILITY IN THE MEDITERRANEAN REGION.

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5. WE UNDERSTAND THAT THE GOT PLANNED THE VISITS OF THE ITALIAN DEFENSE MINISTER, THE CINC OF THE SOVIET NAVY (SEE SEPTTEL) AND THE U.S. CHIEF OF NAVAL OPERATIONS (SEE TUNIS 1788) WITHIN SHORT PERIOD IN ORDER TO DEMONSTRATE GRAPHICALLY TO COLONEL QADHAFI THAT TUNISIA HAS MANY FRIENDS AND DOES NOT STAND ENTIRELY ALONE AGAINST LIBYA IN THE DISPUTE OVER THE CONTINENTAL SHELF. MINISTER FARHAT'S REMARKS AT HIS DINNER ABOUT THE FEROCIOUS APPETITES OF SMALLER COUNTRIES MUST HAVE BEEN DIRECTED AT LIBYA. WHILE LATTANZIO'S PUBLIC STATEMENTS WERE LESS BLUNT, THEY APPEARED GENERALLY SUPPORTIVE OF TUNISIA AND WERE GIVEN AMPLE COVERAGE IN THE TUNIS MEDIA. MULCAHY

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